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# *DÉSORDRES À PONDICHÉRY*

A Paratextual Study of a Novel on a French Trading Post in  
India in the Late 1930s

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The novel *Désordres à Pondichéry* by Georges Delamare (1897-1988) was published in Paris in 1938, dealing with the current situation in the French trading post Pondichéry. A preface by right-wing author Claude Farrère (1876-1957) expressed fear of Communism or anarchy in the city. The plot includes an intruding Communist agent who fails in his mission to induce disorder, and is expelled by the French Governor. The book was “rediscovered” by French historian Jacques Weber in the 1980s, and characterized as a “colonial novel” with a message in concordance with the preface, but omitting facts from the time. A reprint of the original, with a postscript by Weber, was published in 1997. The aim of the study is to provide a context for the novel, and to conduct a paratextual analysis based on the concepts of paratexts according to Gérard Genette. The material is the 1997 edition of the narrative and the two paratexts. Farrère’s original preface contains a stern warning of future threats to Pondichéry, hopes for pertinent readers and an ambiguity toward Delamare’s text. The narrative converges with the paratext regarding historical nostalgia, and a “seascape” is created within the paratextual field. Fears of “communism and anarchy” are told but not “mise en scène”, and the happy ending of the story ruptures the paratextual concordance. In the posthumous postscript, Weber adds a frame of colonial context and understanding of the text. The paratext displays the omission of severe factual events in the text, e.g. the constant disorder in the city and the killing of workers on strike by the French police in 1936. *Désordres à Pondichéry* fits into the pro-colonial, anti-communist French propaganda of the 1930s. The novel has been discussed as a symbol of threats to the French Empire in its entirety.

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# INTRODUCTION

## A FRENCH NOVEL ON PONDICHÉRY – BACKGROUND AND MATERIAL

The south Indian city Pondichéry was once the most important of the five French *comptoirs* in India, established in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> A Tamil-French double culture was established and the written Tamil language was studied by French scholars.<sup>2</sup> Part of the city is still called “French” and contributes to make the city an attractive tourist destination. Certain quarters, streets, squares and a long seaside walk have French names. Historic milestones remain and nostalgic flavours may blend with current impressions.

During a field study period at the University of Pondicherry in November 2014 I searched for fiction in French about Pondichéry and written in Pondichéry, novels from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to now. I was looking for “colonial fiction”, maybe stories reminiscent of Marguerite Duras’ autofictional novels from Indochina.<sup>3</sup> I also searched for Tamil fiction about the life in the colony, Tamil authors writing in French as Indian authors wrote and write in English.<sup>4</sup> But I did not find what I searched for. The kind of fiction I was looking for simply does not exist. In 2003, the Tamil Professor in French literature Ramaya Kichenamourty reviewed the corpus of fiction from the 20<sup>th</sup> century where Pondichéry is mentioned. He found a number of exotic novels, all written in France by French authors. Only one novel was dealing with the situation in Pondichéry, a colonial novel, *Désordres à Pondichéry* by Georges Delamare (1897–1988), published in Paris in 1938.<sup>5</sup>

I was intrigued by the history of Pondichéry and Delamare’s novel. The book was available in Pondichéry. Éditions KailasH, a French-Indian publishing company specialized in Asian and Indian literature, has an office and book store in the city. In 1997, KailasH published *Désordres à Pondichéry* together with the original preface from 1938 by the author

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<sup>1</sup> “Comptoir” is French for “trading post”. In English the French “comptoirs” are sometimes called “colonies” which strictly they never were. The word “colony” is sometimes used for “comptoir” in the essay.

<sup>2</sup> French scholars studied Sanskrit and Tamil in the 17th century and used old texts on palm leaves, now material for research at the Dept. of Indology at *Institut Français* in Pondicherry.

<sup>3</sup> Marguerite Duras, *L’Amant* (Paris, 1984) and *L’Amant de la Chine de Nord* (Paris, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Examples from the 1930’s are two novels inspired by the Gandhi swadeshi movement and the debate on the caste system: Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* from 1935 and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* from 1938.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kichenamourty, “Pondichéry dans le roman Français du XXe siècle” in *Les relations entre la France et l’Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris, 2003), pp. 249-259.

Claude Farrère and a postscript from 1993 by the historian Jacques Weber.<sup>6</sup> The preface and the postscript frame the narrative in two different ways. I knew Jacques Weber as the French historian who has published the most comprehensive work on the history of the French India and Pondichéry.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to how the French lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in 1954 and left Indochina, the decolonialization process of Pondichéry was peaceful. It was quiet also compared to India's struggle for independence from the British Empire achieved in 1947. The Algerian war of liberation 1954–1962 was violent. During the same years, 1954–1962, Pondichéry was liberated step by step, kept a number of French institutions and became an independent territory in India.

The 1997 KailasH edition of *Désordres à Pondichéry* contains the material for my thesis: the preface by Claude Farrère, the narrative by Georges Delamare and the postscript by Jacques Weber.

## AIMS

The essay aims to investigate how French India colonial attitudes are conceptualized in Georges Delamare's novel *Désordres à Pondichéry* from 1938, and compare it with the concepts expressed in the original preface by Claude Farrère. I wanted to know to which extent the two texts express the same colonial message on the history and future of *Pondichéry* and which were the colonial attitudes in France at the time. Furthermore, the material includes the postscript from 1993 by Jacques Weber, providing historical context. I have chosen paratextual comparative close reading to study the narrative in the light of the preface and the postscript.

## DISPOSITION

Theories and methods used for the historical context and Genette-based paratextual analyses are presented, followed by a review of previous research of Delamare's novel. The analysis begins with a description of the context for an understanding of the time for the publication of the novel, the colonial France and Pondichéry in the late 1930s. The first peritext, the original preface by Claude Farrère, is introduced and followed by a short summary of the novel. A

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<sup>6</sup> Georges Delamare, *Désordres à Pondichéry*, (Paris/Pondichéry, 1997). In this 1997 edition the year of the first edition is wrongly presented as 1935, instead of the correct year 1938.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Weber, emeritus professor of history in Nantes, published his extensive thesis (5200 pages) on the history of the French comptoirs in 1988, a summary presented in *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l'Inde après Dupleix, la démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris, 1996). More references to Weber's work can be found in the Bibliography.

discussion of the paratextual convergence and divergence between the side text and the narrative follows. Finally, the posthumous postscript from 1993 by Jacques Weber is discussed with regard to the narrative and the history of Pondichéry. A short conclusion follows.

## THEORY AND METHODS

The concept “transtextuality” is formulated by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette. “Transtextuality” refers to the numerous ways a text can be set in relationship to other texts, both fiction and factual. “Paratexts” such as the author's name, the title, the blurb, preface and postscript, illustrations, accompany the literary text. Genette’s theory on “paratexts” focus on how messages in or around a published work may affect the reader of the work. A paratext may guide the reader to consider the context of the document, who published it, and for what purpose and also how the text could or should be read. “Peritexts” are those paratexts which are included in the published work, e.g. preface, postscript and notes, whereas “epitexts” are paratexts on a greater distance from the literary text, such as diaries, letters or interviews. The speech act of a paratext is different from that of a fictional text. The prefacer, for example, frequently uses direct performatives, addressed to a potential audience, the readers.

In 1991, Marie Maclean published her article “Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral”, based on Genette’s concepts.<sup>8</sup> Maclean discusses how a preface, written by the author of the narrative or a significant somebody else, is a privileged site for addressing the reader. The status of a preface is defined by the nature of the author of the paratext. For an original preface, support of the book is provided by a writer with an authority more firmly established than the author’s. It may also be a manifesto in order to support ideas in the work. A certain message can be conveyed, encouraging “a pertinent reading”. A postscript is discussed in the same way as a foreword, with regard to the time of publication: original, late or posthumous.

For method, I have used the work on paratexts by Genette and Marie Maclean for the analysis of my material: a paratextual comparative close reading of the two paratexts and the narrative in the 1997 edition of *Désordres a Pondichéry*.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Genette states that “it is certain that the historical awareness of the period that saw the birth of a work is rarely a

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Maclean, “Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral”, *New Literary History* (1991), vol. 22, No 2, pp.273-79.

<sup>9</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, English translation by Jane E. Lewin (New York, 1997), [original *Seuils*, Paris 1987]. *Seuils* includes lots of historical references and examples of prefaces.

matter of indifference when reading it”.<sup>10</sup> I used literary sociology to gain knowledge about the historical background for the context of the study and included experiences from my field study period in Pondichéry in 2014 and historical texts on French colonialism, French India and Pondichéry.<sup>11</sup> Scholars who combine historical and comparative literary analyses and have studied Delamare’s novel are presented under “Previous Research” and in notes.

The novel *Désordres à Pondichéry* has not been published in English. Quotations in French are translated into English by me, unless otherwise indicated.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The French historian Jacques Weber was the first to rediscover Delamare’s *Désordres à Pondichéry*. In a lecture, Weber introduced the novel as an antithesis to an English novel by India-born Rumer Godden, a novel filmed in India by Renoir in the 1951, *Le Fleuve*.<sup>12</sup> Weber criticized Rumer Godden for exoticism and referred to Delamare’s work as a colonial novel.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he presented a context for the understanding of the book and the situation in Pondichéry in the 1930s. Farrère’s preface is mentioned, and Weber finds in *Désordres à Pondichéry* “l’expression du même patriotisme, amer et lucide” [the expression of the same patriotism, bitter and clear].<sup>14</sup> Consequently, a concordance with Farrère’s foreword.

In 2005, Weber published an overview of the corpus of French exotic and colonial literature, including a discussion of genres, literary themes and ideology.<sup>15</sup> “Colonial literature” including fiction is based on ideas and factual experience and not only a story being based in an exotic location according to the definition by Roland Lebel.<sup>16</sup> Exotic or oriental literature constitutes other genres according to the presentation.

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<sup>10</sup> Genette, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, la démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris, 1996), M. Gobalakichenane, *La Revolution Francaise des Tamoules de Pondichéry (1790-1793)* (Nantes, 1996-1997), F.S. Miles, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India* (London, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Weber’s text is from his lecture at a seminar on colonial literature held in 1989 and published in 1993 published as “La Société franco-indienne en péril. Désordres à Pondichéry de Georges Delamare, un roman de la décolonisation” in *Rêver l’Asie. Actes de la Table Ronde sur les Littératures coloniales, E.H.E.S.S. 1989*, (Paris, 1993), pp. 381-40. The text is available at Lettre De Centre d’Information et de Documentation de l’Inde Francophone (C.I.D.F), <http://cidif.go1.cc/>.

<sup>13</sup> (Margaret) Rumer Godden (1907-1998), English author born in India. Her book *The River* from 1946 was filmed in India in 1951 by the French director Jacques Renoir and she contributed to the shooting script. The film *Le Fleuve* was popular. Weber criticizes her exoticism. (Rumer Godden did not use her first name and was considered a male author, a way of hiding the female identity discussed by Marie Maclean in “Pretexts and Paratexts”.)

<sup>14</sup> P. 246 in the KailasH 1997 edition.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Weber, ed. *Littérature et histoire colonial, Actes du colloque de Nantes 6 décembre 2003* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Weber 2005, p. 13. Weber quotes a definition made by Roland Lebel in *Histoire de la littérature colonial an France* (Paris, 1931), here simplified in English.

In 2003, the Pondicherrian scholar and Professor in French Literature Ramaya Kichenamourty published an overview of French novels on Pondichéry from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> He concludes that all fiction in French on Pondichéry is written in France for a French public. “Le ‘je’ qui raconte l’histoire étant un ‘je’ européen...” [The ‘I’ who tells the story is a European ‘I’...].<sup>18</sup> Delamare’s book is the one and only “colonial novel” from Pondichéry. Kichenamourty comments the preface by Claude Farrère, recognizes the bitterness from Farrère’s *L’Inde perdue* and questions the implied demands Farrère puts on Delamare’s text.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the French critic Guillaume Bridet states that Delamare’s novel has a message in strong thematic connection with the preface.<sup>20</sup> Bridet underlines that Claude Farrère belonged to the most reactionary political and literary field. Bridet’s postcolonial literary criticism is part of the process of the reevaluation of the history and of the colonial literary heritage. Certain French ‘colonial illusions’ can be identified in Delamare’s novel: “la colonization douce” on how French colonialism intended to “liberate” the colonies in contrast to British rule through “controlling”, “la mission civilisatrice”, the concept of neglect – “le meilleur ennemi de la France c’est la France elle-même” [France is the worst enemy of France].<sup>21</sup>

Kate Marsh, English scholar in French historical studies, analyses the narrative more closely than the others.<sup>22</sup> She agrees with her French colleagues with regard to the characterization of Delamare’s work as a “colonial novel”, a genre she defines as “works of imaginative literature inspired to a significant degree by the colonial experience, regardless of the author’s origins or opinions”.<sup>23</sup> The tension is not between the colonized and the colonizer in Pondichéry, disorder and threats come from the outside. Marsh discusses the preface by Farrère and also relates the text to Farrère’s *L’Inde perdue* from 1935, a polemic, bitter and nostalgic history of France’s colonial failures in India.<sup>24</sup> According to Marsh, “Delamare’s novel appears entirely congruent with Farrère’s own political agenda”.<sup>25</sup> However, when

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<sup>17</sup> R. Kichenamourty, “Pondichéry dans le roman Français du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle” in *Les relations entre la France et de l’Inde*, ed. Jacques Weber (Nantes, 2003), pp. 249-59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ib.* p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> *Ib.* p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> Guillaume Bridet, “D’une colonization avortée à une colonization rêvée; l’utopie colonial de la France en Inde”, in Guillaume Bridet, Sarga Moussa, Christian Petr, *L’usage de l’Inde dans les littératures et européenne*, (Paris/Pondichéry, 2006), pp. 91-93.

<sup>21</sup> *Ib.* p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Kate Marsh, “‘Une éffrayante épidémie’: The Red Threat, Indian Decolonization, and *Désordres à Pondichéry*”, in *Narratives of the French Empire, Fiction, Nostalgia, and Imperial Rivalries, 1784 to the present* (UK, 2013) pp. 65-94.

<sup>23</sup> *Ib.* p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> Claude Farrère, *L’Inde perdue* (Paris 1935).

<sup>25</sup> Marsh, p. 68.



Farrère discusses geopolitics in *L'Inde perdue*, Delamare delivers a snapshot of the situation in Pondichéry in his novel. His selection of facts and crafting of the narrative reveal how colonialism and communism could be conceptualized in popular fiction immediately prior to World War II.<sup>26</sup> Srilata Ravi discusses Delamare's novel and Pondichéry in a comparative analysis of how the access to "border zones" for cultural contact within the colonial triangle France, Britain and India were reduced during the late period of British colonization.<sup>27</sup> Srilata Ravi concludes that Pondichéry remains the most powerful French signifier of *L'Inde perdue*, the 'lost India'.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ib.* p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Srilata Ravi, "Border Zones in Colonial Spaces", in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 12, No 3, 2010, pp. 385-95.

# ANALYSIS

## CONTEXT

The material covers three different texts: the original preface from 1938 written by Claude Farrère, the narrative *Désordres à Pondichéry* by Georges Delamare and the posthumous postscript from 1993 by Jacques Weber. The three texts were published together – as mentioned – by the Asian publication house Éditions KailasH in 1997 in the series *Les exotiques*. The two paratexts, or side texts, are written in two different time periods and provide different perspectives on the narrative, framing the text in two different ways. The postscript includes comments on the preface.

The issue of context is addressed by Gérard Genette in his introduction to *Seuils*.<sup>28</sup> Relevant for this understanding is the time and place of publication: Paris in 1938, a time of culminating French proimperial policy. A short historical orientation on French colonialism in India and the history of Pondichéry is required to understand Farrère's preface and the paratextual field of side text and narrative.

## French Colonialism in India

The first French 'comptoirs' or 'trading stations' in India were established by merchants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Conquering the Dutch, French merchants used a Tamil village and market center on the south east coast of India where cotton fabrics could be produced. A new market was established. The village became Pondichéry, the biggest of the five French 'comptoirs' established in India.<sup>29</sup> But Pondichéry was hard to keep. The colonial history of the city includes European colonial rivalry and is related to a history of sea battles between the French and the English in the Indian Ocean.

Pondichéry became known for its French design of the old town, *ville blanche*, with streets demarcated by surrounding boulevards, elegant French-Tamil buildings and a seaside *promenade*. *Ville blanche* was the place for the elite. A canal separated it from *ville noire*, the Indian part of the city. The city was burnt and rebuilt at several occasions. In 1741 the admiral Bussy gained French access to the town and a period when Pondichéry was a grand city began. The Governor General Dupleix enlarged the surroundings of the city and his statue still remains at the seaside walk in the city. But armed crises with the British continued, Dupleix

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<sup>28</sup> Genette, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> French India included five "comptoirs": Pondichéry, Karikal and Yanaon on the Coromandel Coast, Mahé on the Malabar Coast and Chandernagor in Bengal.

was called home to France and after the final surrender of Pondichéry in 1760, the French admiral in charge, Lally-Tollendal, was beheaded in Paris for his alleged failures in spite of insufficient resources and limited naval support.

One by one, the French possessions on the peninsular south India switched from the French to the British in the early 1750s. The British fleet was the best and most successful.<sup>30</sup> However, the French admiral Suffren conquered the strategic Trincomale on eastern Sri Lanka in the early 1780s, a strong hold during the years of negotiation before Pondichéry was transferred back to the French. Pondichéry did not become a French settlement again until 1814. By then, France had lost power of the Indian ocean to the British and were not allowed to build any fortifications to protect the French colonies or to keep troops in India. Only the right to keep a French police force remained. Thus, the power of Pondichéry was severely reduced. Step by step Pondichéry was enclosed by the British, as was the fact in 1938.

The loss of the once great Pondichéry – or the loss of the dream of what could once have been and remained a grand city – is the background to a certain nostalgia that lingers with the history and memories of Pondichéry. The loss of political importance of French India was also a loss of a dream of India, of exotism, fortunes and spirituality, a strong dream in France, also within fiction and culture.<sup>31</sup>

A second period of colonial expansion followed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jules Ferry, prime minister of France in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was an influential pro-colonialism ideologist. He maintained the French economic dependence of the colonies: from trading post to vast areas of land and “departments”. A new colony meant a new market. The people of the colonies belonged to the colonial assets. During World War I, half a million of the soldiers came from the colonies, also from India and Pondichéry. The ideology of the superior white race was superimposed, with the duty of France to spread enlightenment and Christianity to people lacking knowledge and civilization, France’s “mission civilisatrice”.<sup>32</sup> French colonial authority was described as benevolent and human, a “colonisation douce”, aiming at assimilation in contrast to the British colonial system based on segregation. Bridet

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<sup>30</sup> Personal message, M. Gobalakichenane, historian in Paris, provided me with information on the French Marine ( yahoo-mail 20150419).

<sup>31</sup> Christian Petr, *L'usage de L'Inde des Romans*(Paris 1995) and *L'usage de l'Inde dans les littératures francaises et européenne (XVIII-XX siècle)* ed. Guillaume Bridet and Christian Petr (Paris/Pondichéry 2006) present colonial and exotic European literature on India.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Azar describes French late imperial colonial history and ideology in his doctoral thesis *Frihet, jämlikhet och brodermord, Revolution och kolonialism hos Albert Camus och Frantz Fanon* (Stockholm 2001), pp. 37-59.

summarizes: “La France ne conquiert pas, elle libère” [France does not conquer, she liberates].<sup>33</sup>

During the interwar period, France had colonies all over the world. The colonies were the major trading partners of France during the deep economic crisis in the 1930s. A general interest in the colonies was promoted, the world exhibition *L'Exposition coloniale* of 1931 was extremely popular and was seen by eight million people. Exotism was en vogue, exotic things were on the market. Thus, it is commonplace to view the 1930s as the culmination of French pro-imperial culture. However, the interwar period was also a time for growing opposition in the colonies, partly connected with the worldwide anti-imperial Communist movement following the Russian revolution in 1917. In India, the opposition towards the British grew from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was early introduced in France by the author Romain Rolland (1866-1944) with a great number of articles, a translation of Gandhi's autobiography and Rolland also met Gandhi in Paris.<sup>34</sup> The right wing conservatives in France regarded Gandhi as a revolutionary anti-imperialist and a Hindu enemy of the western Christianity. The swadeshi movement was fearfully related to the future also of the French 'colonies' in India.<sup>35</sup> The French Communist Party, PCF, was anti-imperialistic in the early 1930's but with the rise of fascism in Italy and nazism in Germany the party favoured the retention of the colonies as a buffer against fascism and nazism. Decolonization should wait.

## **The History of Pondichéry and a Presentation of Georges Delamare**

The history of Pondichéry is the history of the French colonizer. Documentation in Tamil is scarce.<sup>36</sup> Pondichéry was an open city for people with different languages and was also a trading center for the Orient. When slavery was abolished a trade with people continued with migration under slavish conditions. Labour was required to different parts of the colonies, also to the islands in the Indian ocean.

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<sup>33</sup> Bridet, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Romain Rolland (1866-1944), French writer who received the Nobel Prize in Literature 1915, pacifist with a strong interest in Indian philosophy. He knew Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948).

<sup>35</sup> Marie Fourcade, “L'usage de Gandhi en France de 1920 à nos jours” in *Les relations entre la France et de l'Inde*, ed. Jacques Weber (Nantes, 2003), pp. 261-274.

<sup>36</sup> M. Gobalakichenane, *La Revolution Française des Tamoules de Pondichéry (1790-1793)* (Nantes, 1996-1997). The thesis provides information on sources in Tamil.

In 1848 the French “suffrage universel” voting system was introduced in Pondichéry. It provided every adult male with a right to vote. It was controversial in a society built on the caste system and it caused severe opposition and disorder in the city at the times for elections.

During WW I, people from the colonies and Pondichéry were recruited and fought for France. Later, when the liberation movement began in British India, Pondichéry welcomed some influential Indian opponents e.g. Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) from Calcutta and the Tamil writer and journalist Bâradi (1882–1921), known as the “revolutionary poet”.<sup>37</sup> They escaped the British police and had the means to live in comfort and to publish freely in Pondichéry. However, Pondichéry and its hamlets became enclosed by the British in the 1930s, closed as never before. Pondichéry’s position within the French Empire was weak but in the procolonial time of the 1930s all media were encouraged to celebrate the colonies. The year 1938 was a proper time to publish a novel as *Désordres à Pondichéry*.

George Delamare (Georges was his pen name) was a well known writer of fiction and plays for theatre and radio, also a theater director. He lived in Paris and was a popular editor at the broadcasting company “Radiodiffusion française”. Radio was a medium with an impact for news and entertainment at the time.<sup>38</sup> Delamare was interested in history and the colonies. He had never been to Pondichéry but according to Marsh used a travelogue for details of the city plan.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, little is available on Delamare’s biography, in contrast to the life and work of Farrère, and nothing on their relation and if and how they and the publisher may have cooperated with the publication on *Désordres à Pondichéry*. The novel was well received in France in 1938 and became popular in France, with seven editions in the year of publication.

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<sup>37</sup> Sri Aurobindo, born Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), well-off Indian nationalist, writer and yogi, founder of Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondichéry in 1926. His French spiritual collaborator “The Mother” founded the township Auroville in the outskirts of Pondichéry. The Tamil “revolutionary poet” Soupramaniam Bâradi (1882-1921) was a freedom loving journalist who included compassion, uproar and Dalit support in his texts. He is remembered with a park, a museum and a statue in Pondicherry.

<sup>38</sup> In the 1930s, the radio networks produced popular programs and had an impact. The 1938 broadcast of H.G. Wells’ novel *The War of the Worlds* produced and narrated by Orson Welles scared an American audience, one of the most famous programs in the history of radio. Georg Delamare was a well known producer and radio profile in France, also presenting news bulletins after 1945

<sup>39</sup> Kate Marsh mentions the travelogue by Douglas Taylor, *De Lanka a Pondichéry* (Paris, 1931) (p.76). Taylor’s book was popular and came in two editions in 1931. Marsh also quotes Taylor and finds “syntax and ideas” from Taylor in Delamare’s novel, e.g. the description of Place Dupleix.

## THE PREFACE – *MON CHER AMI* – BY CLAUDE FARRÈRE

The original preface to *Désordres à Pondichéry* is a short, two pages letter written from Claude Farrère to Georges Delamare beginning with the informal *Mon cher ami*, My dear friend. As an original preface it is published together with the first publication of the novel in 1938. Gravitas is added to the friendly introduction through the formal signature “CLAUDE FARRÈRE de l’Académie française”.

In *Seuils*, Genette writes about how the support of an original preface by a writer with an authority more firmly established than the author’s can contribute to the attention of a book.<sup>40</sup> Claude Farrère was such an authority, a well-known author and a member of *Académie Française*, the French literary academy. Farrère was a navy officer and had sailed (or steamed) the oceans, he knew the Orient and had fought sea battles. His first novel was published in 1902, he received the Goncourt prize for *Les Civilisés* in 1905, left the navy in 1921 and wrote a novel a year until 1955. He belonged to a group of French authors who wrote exotic and oriental poetry and fiction. In 1934 Farrère published a major work on the history of the French Marine and in 1935 *L’Inde perdue*, a critical text on the losses France had made in India due to geopolitical incompetence, neglect and lack of resources for the Marine.<sup>41</sup> According to Bridet, Farrère sympathized with *Action française*, the French far right political movement, supporting the fascist Franco and the Italian fascist regime.<sup>42</sup> Thus it is clear who was “the addresser”, i.e. the writer of the preface.

According to Genette, different illocutionary acts are involved in a side text as a preface and in the work of fiction. The paratext may involve several first order illocutionary acts to address the reader. Farrère’s first addressee is “the dear friend”, Delamare. Farrère praises his book and finds the plot and the sequence of events well constructed. Delamare’s picture of Pondichéry captures Farrère’s interest:

Mais l’intérêt principal m’apparaît surtout dans la peinture que vous faites de ce Pondichéry pittoresque et suranné, qui s’efforce ingénument de devenir modern et qui n’y réussit guère, étant donné le handicap terrible que lui vaut son isolement au milieu de l’Inde actuelle, tout entière anglaise, et qui ne cessera vraisemblablement de l’être que pour tourner au Communisme ou à l’anarchie (p.7).

<sup>40</sup> Two examples of this kind of supportive allographic prefaces are E.M. Forster’s preface to Mulk Raj Anand’s novel *Untouchable* a few years after its first publication in 1935, to introduce it to English readers, and Jean Paul Sartre’s original introductory essay to Frantz Fanon’s life’s work *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris 1961), published shortly before Fanon’s death from leukemia the same year.

<sup>41</sup> Claude Farrère *Historie de la Marine Française* (Paris, 1934) and *L’Inde perdue* (Paris, 1935). A number of Claude Farrère’s works were published internationally. Today, four of them are available online at Gutenberg.com, e.g. *Les Civilisés* (1905).

<sup>42</sup> Guillaume Bridet, “D’une colonisation avortée à une colonisation rêvée; l’utopie coloniale de la France en Inde”, in Guillaume Bridet, Sarga Moussa, Christian Petr, *L’usage de l’Inde dans les littératures et européennes*, (Paris/Pondichéry, 2006), p. 90.

[But the principal interest appears to me to be above all your depiction of this picturesque and outdated Pondichéry, which is endeavouring ingeniously to become modern but it is hardly succeeding, given the terrible handicap that it has of being isolated in the middle of today's India, entirely English, and which will probably cease to be so only by turning to Communism or anarchy.] *Translation by Kate Marsh.*

The picturesque old Pondichéry is in danger: the city is enclosed by the English and at risk for a future of Communism or anarchy. These three components constitute the threat to the French Pondichéry according to Farrère, the city made vulnerable due to French neglect.

The word “Pondichéry” inspires Farrère to write about the past and the colonial history of Dupleix, with combined nostalgia and geopolitical criticism. Farrère is bitter and considers what could have become of Pondichéry if France had had a better understanding of India and of the sea: “la mer, vrai véhicule de toute civilisation qui veut durer” [the sea, the true vehicle for any civilization which wants to prevail]. He writes about Pondichéry:

Pondichéry... La vieille capital de Dupleix aurait pu devenir une grande ville. (DP p.7)... Pondichéry, par suite de l'échec Français, a continué de ne jamais être qu'un lointain bibelot, témoin discret du temps passé. On y peut rêver de ce qu'aurait été la France si le peuple Français avait compris la mer (p. 7-8).

[Pondichéry... The old capital from the days of Dupleix could have become a grand city. Pondichéry, due to the French failures, has continued to remain nothing but a distant bibelot, a witness of past times. One can dream about what could have been France if the French people had understood the sea.]

The statement of the sea may confuse the reader. The sea is not a metaphor.<sup>43</sup> Farrère reminds the reader of the colonial importance of the sea, the choice of ports, the European competition at sea and sea battles, the market and the status and support of the French Marine.

Finally, there is ambiguity in how Farrère values Delamare's text.. Farrère expresses both appreciation and disavowal of the text. He considers the plot well written but complains about the end of the book.

Vous êtes trop bon Français pour avoir poussé jusqu'au bout – l'impitoyable logique de votre histoire. Je vous en félicite et je le regrette tout à la fois. Je souhaite à votre livre le succès qu'il mérite et que vous méritez, et je souhaite que beaucoup de Français, l'ayant lu, aient le courage d'y réfléchir et de mesurer la grandeur que nous avons failli atteindre et que nous n'atteindrons plus jamais, par notre seule faute... Tant pis (p. 9).

[You are too much of a good Frenchman to have ...to the end - the merciless logic of your story. I congratulate you to it and regrets it at the same time. I wish your book all the success it is worth and that you are worth, and I wish that many French, when they have read it, will have the courage to think about the grandness we could have reached and that we will never more be able to reach, due to our own failure...Too bad.]

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<sup>43</sup> The repeated use of the word “la mer” (the sea) in the preface confused me and has not been addressed in previous research. I considered a metaphor but changed my view after reading an article by Philip E. Steinberg, “Of other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions”, *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 156-169. Steinberg writes: “Studies that seek to highlight political-economic connections across ocean basins tend to ignore the sea altogether, while those that highlight it as a site for challenging modernist notions of identity and subjectivity tend to treat the ocean solely as a metaphor.” (p.1, Summary.)

The illocutionary function of the side text becomes strong. Farrère addresses not only Delamare but furthermore the readers of the novel, he hopes for pertinent readers with the courage to consider the French colonial history of Pondichéry, probably in the same bitter way the sender does himself. How Farrère had wanted the end of the story he does not tell. But his speech act is strong, he is stern.

To conclude, the preface has a message about the current situation of Pondichéry, enclosed by the British, and future threats to the city. There is also an ambiguity to Delamare's text, the end of the narrative. The message includes geopolitical criticism of the French colonial policy in India, and neglect of the French Marine.

In previous research Weber and Bridet characterize Delamare's novel as "a colonial novel with a message" in accordance with Farrère's preface. Marsh agrees and finds the novel "entirely congruent with Farrère's own political agenda".<sup>44</sup> However, Kichenamourty considers Farrère's preface so close to his own *L'Inde perdue* that Farrère transfers his own values to Delamare's text: "Les propos que tient Claude Farrère semblent imposer un sens à l'œuvre et "repragmatiser" le texte du romancier" [The suggestions Farrère makes seem to impose a certain meaning of the work and to "repragmatizing" the novelist's text].<sup>45</sup>

## THE NARRATIVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE PREFACE<sup>46</sup>

*Désordres à Pondichéry* is a short novel, 98 pages with eleven numbered chapters. The title is commented by Marsh who considers Pondichéry a *picturesque* place which allows Delamare to a certain nostalgia.<sup>47</sup> Kichenamourty has also commented the choice of the city: "Pour Georges Delamare, Pondichéry is a French space that he wants to keep as it is for ever."<sup>48</sup>

The plot covers a few weeks. The story is told by an omniscient narrator, the narrative time of the plot covers a few weeks. It is a light book, easy to read, lively with frequent dialogues, and the author sketches characters with humorous details. Several chapters could be used for a script for radio or theater. The 'serious matters and threats' – communism and anarchy – are

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<sup>44</sup> Marsh, p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> Kichenamourty, p. 252.

<sup>46</sup> In this part of the essay French words are written in italics and references to the narrative and side texts with the page numbers within brackets in the text.

<sup>47</sup> Marsh, p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> Kichenamourty, p. 250. In a so called post-colonial perspective, one can read this as the colonizer's denial of the right to the "space" by others than the French, i.e. the colonized. However, it is not a statement made by Kichenamourty.



more often commented than ‘put on stage’. To begin with, a summary of the narrative is required.

## Summary

The French protagonist Gourdieu is an adventurer with a suspicious background and character. After a “mishap” in Indochina, he is recruited in Paris to become an agent in Pondichéry for the Communist organization “*l’Union des Revendications panasiatiques*”. Promised ample payment Gourdieu arrives in Pondichéry. He finds *ville blanche* with the statue of Dupleix dusty, neglected and utterly boring. In contrast, *ville noire* is exotic and lively. (All natives are called Hindos.) Gourdieu introduces himself with a (false) letter of recommendation to the French indigo manufacturer, M. Morel and is generously welcomed as an *économiste distingué*. Morel is widowed and has a mixed-raced daughter, the young *métisse* Françoise, a respected synthesis of cultural mix in Pondichéry. Françoise is secretly in love with a visiting Englishman, the cynical Higgins, who wants her to elope and falsely promises her marriage. Morel is strongly opposing the British, the taxes and difficulties imposed on the city and surroundings by the British make life hard in the trading post. The threat of local influence of the Gandhi swadeshi movement has been reported to Paris by the French official La Verdière who has experience also from Hanoi and Saigon, but Paris never confirmed his report and Morel does not believe in any risk of the kind. Gourdieu recruits Nerhunu, a professional Indian Communist colporteur, to organize the workers in Pondichéry against capitalist exploitation, starting with the workers at Morel’s factory. The rumour of a strike quickly spreads among the the French officials and the old French industrial families. The French Governor receives a telegram from Paris: the leaders for the Communist league which recruited Gourdieu are under arrest, Gourdieu’s cover is blown and he must immediately be thrown out of the city. Proofs of Gourdieu’s guilt are given to Morel by the temple priest Asoka. A letter from Gourdieu to his contact in Paris has been found in Gourdieu’s brief case by when he went for a rendez-vous with the young *bayadère* Krishna, disrespecting her holiness. He was punished with violence and lost his brief case at the temple. Gourdieu’s attempt to create disorder in Pondichéry is a failure. Françoise is packing her bags to leave and join Higgins, but happens to listen when Gourdieu tells Morel about her English love affair. Françoise decides to stay with her father and simultaneously, Gourdieu leaves with a police escort and Nerhunu escapes the city. There is order in Pondichéry again. The attempted uprising was doomed to fail from the beginning.

## *La ville blanche*, a City Walk and a ‘History Lesson’

At the arrival in Pondichéry, Gourdieu is taken ashore in a flat bottomed Indian boat, an exotic *chelingue*, landing on the beach avenue that runs along the French quarters of the city. Gourdieu is not impressed when he walks the streets of the famous *ville blanche*: “Pas folichon, le patelin! ronchonne-t-il” [Not so interesting, this godforsaken place!” he grumbled] (p. 13).<sup>49</sup> His walk through the streets is a depressing experience of decay and nostalgia.<sup>50</sup>

Gourdieu prends contact avec les larges rues coupées à angles droit, les maisons à architecture pompeuse qui font penser à un Versailles tropical. La place Dupleix garde encore le trace des jardins à la Française, mais une herbe poussiéreuse efface les nobles parterres d’antan; la statue du conquérant de l’Inde ne domine plus qu’un vaste esplanade calcinée. Parallèlement à la mer, la

<sup>49</sup> Translated by R. Kichenamourty.

<sup>50</sup> Farrère’s preface is nostalgic, the lovely bibelot Pondichéry is lost but not forgotten. There is a convergence in the narrative. The loss is due to the incompetence and the long time neglect by the metropolis, including the negligence of the importance of the French Marine. Marsh calls it “imperial nostalgia”, p.73-75.

*Ville Blanche* s'étend, avec ses demeures élégantes aus toits égaux, avec ses belles lignes d'une régularité grandiose, cite batie dans l'ivresse de la victoire...mais don't la splendeur n'est plus qu'un fantome. Les facades montrent des plaies ploffondes, les balustrades...sous les massives pluies de novembre... Faute d'argent, faute de main-d'oeuvre et surtout d'ambition, nul effort de restauration n'est entrepris et, peu à peu, les palais...entrent dans le néant des glories évanouies.  
(p. 14)

[Gourdieu encountered the wide roads at right angles, the pretentious architecture of the houses evoking tropical Versailles. The *place Dupleix* still had the lay out of gardens done in the French style, but a dusty grass had obliterated the noble flowerbeds of former times; the statue of the conqueror of India now overlooked only a scorched esplanade. Parallel to the sea stretched the *ville blanche*... a city built during the intoxicating days of victory, ....in which, however, the splendour was only a haunting memory. The walls revealed deep wounds, the balustrades and acroterions, exquisitely designed, crumbled away slowly under the heavy November rains... Because of lack of money, lack of labour and above all lack of ambition, no restoration efforts had been undertaken, and little by little the palaces, ...entered into the oblivion of past glories.]  
*Translation by Marsh, p.73.*

Gourdieu becomes melancholic at the sight of the deterioration and neglect of houses, streets and gardens. The mention of *place Dupleix* is in convergence with Farrère's preface with "*Pondichéry... La vieille capital de Dupleix*". It is Dupleix' once grand city that is decaying due to lack of French funding and ambition. The mentioned November rains provide local colour, the knowledge of the monsoon.

Gourdieu does not know more of French India than the names of the *comptoirs*. A 'history lesson' is inserted in the text on Gourdieu's walk (pp. 20-27). The history of Pondichéry is told, from 1674 and forwards, with focus on the proud years of Dupleix who "every day expanded the comptoir and won the hearts of the Indians". Louis XV and Pompadour enjoyed exotism, the court dreamt of *bayadères* and Rameau composed *Les Indes Galantes*.<sup>51</sup> The absence of political skill, means and interest to protect *les comptoirs* was a fact. The famous French admirals – seven are mentioned by their names - neither had a fleet with the same means and support as the English, nor the same clever geopolitical strategy.

## The Seascape

The 'history lesson' ends with a drama: one day Europeans may be forced into the sea by armed forces of "yellow and black" and *La République* will not have vessels to rescue them.

Un jour, peut-être, elle s'avisera de contempler, dans ses villes outre-mer, de multitudes armées, jaunes ou noires, brandissant des fusils, installant des mitrailleuses, pilotant des avions et poussant droit à la mer un quarteron d'Européens. La République, alors, criera: "Des vaisseaux, des cuirasses pour porter là-bas mes troupes!" Mais y aura-t-il de vaisseaux? Qui dit colonies dit marine... (p. 23).

[Maybe one day, she will have to consider, in the towns overseas, multitudes of armies, yellow or black, waving their fusils, installing their machine guns, piloting their planes, pushing a handful of

<sup>51</sup> Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), French composer, *Les Indes galantes* is an opera-ballett divertissement with exotic names (not sounds).

Europeans right into the sea. And then, what happens ? La République will shout for vessels, battleships to send her troupes over there ! But will there be any vessels ? If you say colonies that means marines... ]

With this text, a paratextual field of a “seascape” is established. Farrère writes about the sea in his preface, the importance of conquering the sea “for every civilization that wants to endure” and how the French have had no true understanding of the importance of the sea. When Delamare writes about the sea as a future graveyard for Europeans and *la France* unable to rescue them due to lack of vessels, Delamare takes the bitterness from the paratext further and into the future. There is a colonial disaster in the short part of the narrative, related to Farrère’s repeated use of the word “la mer”, “the sea”. The motive is not used or referred to in any other part of the text.<sup>52</sup>

### ***La ville noire***

In contrast to the dull *ville blanche*, *la ville noire* is lively, with happy and laughing people and music on the streets, an oriental fairy-tale, a happy exotic dream (p.42). Everybody is welcome. People of mixed races are respected in Pondichéry. The coconut trees, the bazars, the beautiful darkhaired women with bracelets, a pearl in the nostril, a flowery *male* string of Bengali roses or jasmine in the hair. Men have nude legs and face-painting in colours to mark the disciples of *Siva* or *Vichnou*. White clothing drying on a balcony belong to a high caste Hindou, quite close a *paria* is squatting and chewing betel.<sup>53</sup> The narrative provides the reader with a set of exotic details, full of life. There is no concordance with the preface, the exotic details belong to the narrative only. However, Pondichéry is lovable in the foreword: Pondichéry is “pittoresque” and “un lointain bibelot” [“a distant bibelot”] (pp.7-8). In the preface the time is out for the curio, but in the narrative there is life for all in the Indian city.

### **The ‘Red Threat’, Anarchy and Gandhi**

Gourdieu’s mission is to work as a communist agent for ‘URPA, l’Union des Revendications Panasiatiques’, a league depending on Moscow. The task is to mobilize factory workers and create a proletariat and disorder in Pondichéry. The story of his recruitment in Paris by a Monsieur Richelot is told in an early analepsis. Gourdieu is not a committed communist, he is a third-grade agent. He is broke, he needs money. He knows Indochina, Pondichéry is less popular than Hanoi or Saigon but the only place available and he accepts. Gourdieu is to make

<sup>52</sup> The theme ‘la mer’ is not discussed in the texts I have found on Farrère’s preface.

<sup>53</sup> “Paria” in French at the time used for “the untouchables”, “the dalites” and later “The scheduled classes”. All “natives” in the narrative are referred to as “Hindous”, except the *métisse* Françoise

contact with a certain M. Morel, a representant of one of “the old French families” in Pondichéry, the head of an enterprise producing an exquisite shade of indigo colour.

Gourdieu introduces himself to Morel with a false letter of recommendation and Morel is generous and helpful and quickly provides Gourdieu with proper housing and staff. Morel is highly respected in Pondichéry, his French family dates back to the days of Dupelix, he fought and was decorated in WW I. Morel owns a factory producing a specific shade of indigo colour. He is generous and tolerant to almost everything except the English. Morel is a widower and has a daughter, the young and beautiful *métisse* Françoise. (Françoise is secretly in love with a young Englishman, Higgins, he wants her to elope with him but with no intention to marry her.)

Through dialogues Morel becomes Gourdieu’s informant. Gourdieu collects information on Morel, his industry, his values and his opinions on the situation of Pondichéry. Morel is a true colonial patriot and has the opinion that in all French India, the workers are well treated. There is no need for trade unions in Pondichéry, he says, after a question from Gourdieu. “Il n’a pas sujet de le faire, répond Morel, il n’est point lésé ni molesté. Dans tout l’Inde française, la population connaît une liberté aussi complete que possible” [There is no need to do that, Morel answers, the workers are not treated wrongly or manhandled. In all French India, the population lives in freedom as complete as possible] (p. 45-46).

The French govern in complete understanding with the Indian population, in contrast to the harsh British. What *does* make “les indigenes” [“the natives”] complain are the many difficulties and taxes the British enforce, administrative restrictions on transportation for the small villages of Pondichéry on British territory. In the narrative, Pondichéry is enclosed and restricted, in convergence with what Farrère says in the preface.

Gourdieu introduces questions on Gandhi in order to investigate attitudes among the French in the city. Gandhi is dangerous only for the English, not for the French Morels says:

Si la France eût gardé les Indes, jamais un Gandhi n’y fût devenue populaire. Pourquoi? Parce que nous savons être les amis des peuples, bien que leur maîtres. Tandis que l’Anglais ne connaît point d’égaux, hors les Anglais (p.114).

[If France had kept the Indies, a Gandhi would never have become popular. Why? Because we know how to be the friends of peoples, more than their masters. While the English know no equals, except the English.]

*Translated by Marsh, p. 80.*

Workers protests, trade unions, Ghandiism – no threats of “communism or anarchy” are “mise en scène” in the city. The hotel owner tells Gourdieu him about the elections when the city is in uproar and everybody votes, parias as well of high caste Hindous. The only difference is

that they don't have the same polling booths. But no elections take place during Gourdieu's stay. The narrative is diverging from the paratext, the hotel owner is a character who jokes.

However, one description of serious threats in concordance with the peritext is included in the text. Monsieur La Verdière, a friend of Morel and an official at the Governor's office, well informed and with experience from Hanoi and Saigon, has written a report to Paris about the situation in Pondichéry. La Verdière knows that there are "Gandhi-likes" in the city who push the boycott of European products. He considers them part of the anti-colonial communist movement subsidized by Moscow. The swadeshi message is now spreading from British India to French India. But two years have gone without a response to the report (pp. 57-58f). The existence of a "double threat of communism or anarchy" is as clear in the text as is the neglect by the metropolis. But the city seems quiet. And Mme LaVerdiere is a comic character.

### **The evil agents: Gourdieu and Nerhunu**

After a while Gourdieu finds an accomplice, a native Indian journalist and *colporteur*.<sup>54</sup> Nerhunu has a French education, has lost his native roots but the education has not provided him with a position in accordance with his education. He is marginalized and bitter. Nerhunu knows the local languages and Gourdieu "employs" him to start an uprising among workers in the different factories. Together they start the organization *La Ligue d'Évolution hindoue* and Nerhunu distributes information and invitations to a constituting meeting in Salle Cinema. Few come, Gourdieu is a lousy speaker, no film is shown, it is a total failure. As a next step, Gourdieu invites Morel and his friends for a picnic. Nerhunu appears at Morel's factory to speak to the workers. And he knows what to say:

Vous, vous êtes les prolétaires...les bons à tuer, pour enrichir les exploités...Le patron n'a que la peine de porter à la banque l'argent que vous avez gagné! Que les ouvriers de toutes les usines marchent ensemble, ceux de l'indigo, ceux des huileries, ceux des filatures, ceux des rizières, et, si le patron résiste, en avant la grève générale! (p. 133)

[You, you are the proletariat...The boss only has to work with carrying the money you have earned to the bank! If all workers at the factories rise/march together, from the indigo factories, those from the oil...from the spinning factories, ..and if 'le patron' resist, we go for a general strike!]

The workers listen but the agent does not light any powder keg. But the rumour about the meeting spreads quickly among the old French families. The character Adrien Frémont, a colleague to Morel, swiftly makes a visit to the Governor about the matter. Frémont talks

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<sup>54</sup> At the time, it was cheap and simple to start a newspaper and print booklets and to sell them. According to Marsh there was a widespread fear in France in the 1930s that travelling salesmen, *colporteurs*, could use printing facilities to export Communism and anti-colonialism in the colonies.(p. 72).

about communism as a pest that spreads everywhere among workers, killing the whole idea of work, as an epidemic, apparent in Algeria, Tonkin and Cochinchine:

Quinze ans, monsieur le gouverneur, quinze ans que ça dure de mal en pis! Encore, en Inde française Française, n'avons-nous affaire qu'à des comparses, les premiers rôles étant réservés aux grandes scènes. Algérie, Tonkin, Cochinchine... Mais les uns et les autres sont pareillement porteurs de mauvais germes; une consigne de pestes les envoie partout où l'on travaille, pour tuer la notion, le sens et jusqu'à l'idée du travail! Oui, c'est comme une effrayante épidémie [...](p. 149)

[Fifteen years, M. le Gouverneur, fifteen years is has lasted and it is going from bad to worse! Still in French India, we are concerned only with the sidekicks, the lead roles have been reserved for the large stages of Algeria, Tonkin, Cochinchine... But both roles are carriers of bad germs; instructions for the spread of the plague send them wherever industry is taking place, to kill the concept of good sense and the idea of work! Indeed, it is like a terrifying epidemic [...]]  
Translated Marsh, p. 84.

Fremont says that the “terrifying epidemic” is a threat to all humankind, not only to Pondichéry.<sup>55</sup> This statement is quite in convergence with the preface, but efficient action is taken. Waiting for Morel, the Governor remembers when he twenty years ago handled “*les colporterus de révolte*” and met with the “*le sophisme de proletariat triomphant*”.

Dans sa méditation, il ne fait point de différence entre les Français adoptifs et les autres, unis à l'abri d'une responsabilité paternelle. Lorsque de mauvais amis s'ingénient à pervertir les fils, à les éloigner de l'honneur et de l'ordre, que doit faire le chef de famille, sinon préserver malgré eux, ..., et châtier impitoyablement ceux qui les ont corrompus? – L'autorité seule, c'est vrai... (p. 144)

[In his meditation, he makes no difference between the adopted French and the others, united under the roof of the same paternal responsibility. In spite of bad friends who ingeniously try to pervert the sons, to take their honour and order, what should the head of the family do but maintain .... and without mercy punish those who corrupted them? - Only authority, that is true...]

The Governor's meditative thoughts include himself as the imperial father of the whole French India, concerned, responsible and fair. The rebellious children will be treated with the authority.

## The End

“The end” of the text comprises one single day and has a high narrative speed with simultaneous events and dialogues. People come and go, doors are opened and closed in a high number of entrances and exits. The Governor receives a telegram from Paris on Gourdieu's ‘mission’ as a communist agent and that he must be expelled the city immediately. The Governor receives Fremont and Morel is brought to the Governor and is interviewed. Gourdieu is arrested. Nerhunu quickly leaves by car to some secret hiding. The bad Englishman Higgins (who does not want to tell his father in Cardiff about Françoise) leaves by train for Madras and Françoise starts packing to follow him. The Hindu priest Asoka visits

<sup>55</sup> According to Marsh, the concept “terrifying epidemic” was used to such an extent that it is a cliché. (p. 84).

Morel with evidence of Gourdieu's secret business. Gourdieu manages to see Morel to borrow money and tells Morel about Françoise's love story. Morel is devastated, his daughter with an Englishman, nothing could be worse. Françoise is moved by her father and her own good heart (a heritage from her dead mother). She has never liked Gourdieu and she snatches his hairpiece to humiliate him in front of her father. Finally and simultaneously, Françoise does not join her English lover. She stays and Gourdieu leaves, thrown out of the city. No workers strike, nobody protests on the streets. The French officials and old families show the opposite to neglect, but manage efficiently in close contact with Paris and with the support of a native Hindu priest. The true Good stays, the Evil leaves. The good order is restored in the city.

The narrative can be read like a script for a play, the 'perpetrators' lacked moral but also the skill to create serious disorder of "communism or anarchy". Compared with the stern speech act in Farrère's preface, Delamare's end is quite divergent.

### Villenour and Krishna

Delamare's narrative includes an exotic story, important for the plot but unrelated to "the message" of the preface. The protagonist Gourdieu has other interests than his "mission". When he complains that he is bored receives an interesting piece of information from the hotel owner he met at his arrival:

..nous avons les bayadères ! ...les danseuses de Villenour, "très jolies et toutes jeunes, monsieur, dix, douze ans, et bien formées, et qui savent déjà y faire ! Oh ! évidemment, il faut procéder avec discrétion... Mais, quand on a de l'argent..." (p. 28-29)

[...we have the *bayadères* ! the dancers in Villenour, very beautiful and quite young, monsieur, ten, twelve years old, well shaped, and they already know how to do it ! Oh ! of course, one has to act with discretion... But, if one has the money...]

Suddenly, Gourdieu feels happy to be in Pondichéry – he realizes how to find some joy and he has the money. He is invited to a visit Villenour by the French couple La Verdier and together with Morel and Françoise. The text provides exotic details. Villenour is a lush village with palm trees and the water of *le Grand Étang d'Oussoudou* in the middle of rice paddies. The high *pagoda* is decorated with divinities. It is a celebration of *La Lumière Illimitée* performed in May.<sup>56</sup> People from both *ville blanche* et *ville noir* are assembled and the French visitors are greeted with flowers by the priests and placed on the first row of seats in the *pandala*. Six *bayadères* dance and suddenly Krishna appears, the princess of the dancers. She

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<sup>56</sup> R. Kichenamourty describes details of the place, temple and May festivities in his paper from 2003, with more wine and less strict than in Delamare's narrative. Contact could discretely be taken with the *bayadères*. -The once exotic Villenour is today a suburb of Pondicherry, the pagoda is unkept and surrounded by a parking lot. A Catholic church in white, blue and gold dominates the village premises. (p. 251-52.)

is very young, with a round face and dark eyes, her hair decorated with jewels. She opens her arms to the public, exposes her body, she meets the eyes of the audience. Gourdieu is lost – he wants her. He manages to sneak away to find Krishna and invite her to become “his darling”, takes her yes for granted, but no. She gets his name and address, for a message to be sent to him and he takes it as a promise of a *rendez-vous*. Afterwards, Morel warns Gordieu for any attempt to approach Krishna, she is a sacred incarnation of a variety of Buddha. Gourdieu ignores the warning, unaware of the risk he has taken, a risk for the coming exposure of his “mission”.

How ‘oriental’ has the “colonial novel” become with the exotic Villenour and the information on dancers “ten, twelve years old, well shaped, and they already know how to do it”? A theme in ‘oriental’ fiction is eroticism, often the products of male imagination of sensual, voluptuous and willing women.<sup>57</sup> In Farrère’s novel *Les Civilisés* the male protagonist Fierce needs a *maîtresse*, the only acceptable distraction during the hours of the siesta in Saigon.<sup>58</sup> He discusses the matter with the seller of this certain ‘product’, and hears that the white prostitutes are expensive and old, but there are better alternatives:

Nous avons par contre un lot gentil d'Annamites, de métisses, de Japonaises et même de Chinoises;—tout cela jeune et frais, sinon joli. —Je prendrai une Annamite, dit Fierce.[...] Je prendrai une Annamite, ou plusieurs [...] D'ailleurs, nous recauserons de cela, et je vous demanderai votre avis à tous deux. (*Les Civilisés*, p. )

[We also have a number of nice Annamites, métisses, Japanese and also Chinese – all quite young and fresh, apart from being pretty. I take an Annamite, says Fierce. [...] I take an Annamite, or a couple of them. [...] and I will ask your opinion of both of them.]

Farrère describes a trade of displaying and selling women, the younger the better. Today it would be called ‘literary pedophilia’. A touch of orientalism lingers in Delamare’s novel due to the “Krishna-story”. The reader can only make the association and wonder about a possible allusion to a work by Farrère, or simply consider the text spiced with something exotic and hot.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Weber, Jacques, ed. *Littérature et histoire coloniale, Actes du colloque de Nantes 6 décembre 2003* (Paris, 2005)

<sup>58</sup> In an attempt to understand how the expression *Cher ami* was used for a preface of the time, I found that Farrère used the expression in an introductory letter published as an authorial preface to his own novel *Les Civilisés*. The letter begins with *Cher ami* and the addressee is “A Monsieur Pierre Louÿs”, an author. Farrère continues that Perre Louÿs’ novel *Aphrodite* was the work that made him decide to become an author. Published in 1896, *Aphrodite* caused a scandal because of its open eroticism.- Farrère and Louÿs became and stayed friends.

<sup>59</sup> The “Krishna-story” is mentioned but not discussed in works included in Previous Research. The concepts and genres of “exotism” and “orientalism” are discussed by Jacques Weber, “La Litterature, une source de l’histoire coloniale (1899-1980). Eroticism belongs to the “oriental” genre, as in Pierre Louÿs’ *Aphrodite*.



## THE POSTSCRIPT BY JACQUES WEBER AND ITS RELATION TO THE NARRATIVE

Jacques Weber's postscript is a reprint of an article published in 1993, based on a lecture held in 1989.<sup>60</sup> It was "the birth of the rediscovery" of Delamare's novel, a true "colonial novel". Weber appreciates Delamare's realism in the presentation of the land, the people and the precarious French influence in Pondichéry.

Weber walks the reader through the narrative. He comments the text and provides facts on the history of both Pondichéry and the metropol. The side text frames the narrative and within the frame, the narrative lives. Weber identifies significant French colonial ideological concepts in the text. Morel tells Gourdieu that the French know how to make friends, as opposed to the English. Thanks to this generous *civilization franco-indienne* industrial workers in Pondichéry do not need trade unions and Gandhi is not a threat to French India, only to the British (p.220).<sup>61</sup> Morel and LaVerdier respect "native" values and beliefs, the caste system and religious traditions (p. 222). Morel and his *métisse* daughter Françoise symbolize the absence of racism in Pondichéry (p. 219). (Higgins incorporates the evil of the English.) The precarity of the French influence is exemplified with the situation of Nerhunu, Gourdieus accomplice. He suffers from the "integrated education": he has cut his native roots, reached the highest level of French education but cannot get the same posts as the French. He is humiliated, and turns his anger into under-ground journalism, becomes a *colporteur* (p. 232-33).

With regard to context and narrative, no fictive intruders were needed in the 1930s. According to Weber, there was a permanent agitation and chaos in the city since the 1880s. The influential Chanemougam rules the city through a party of "indian traditionalists", a divide-and-rule practice, splitting the inhabitants according to religion, reducing the influence of the French and enterprises of the mixed races (p. 241). When the hotel owner tells Gourdieu that the city is lively during the elections, in contrast to the boring calm Gourdieu experiences in *la ville blanche*, the postscript includes factual information on elections described as bloodbaths (p. 242).

Weber comments on "facts and fiction: "Le roman colonial, qui émet des jugements apodictiques, s'accommode parfois mal des certains faits et préfère les occulter" [A colonial

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<sup>60</sup> Weber's publication from 1993 is used as the postscript in the 1997 KailasH edition of *Désordre à Pondichéry*. The postscript comprises 39 pages divided into six chapters, and 28 notes. History of the edition, see page 7, note 10

<sup>61</sup> Pagination continues and follows the page numbers of the novel.

novel, which emits “des jugements apodictiques“ may not be able to put up with certain facts and prefers to conceal them] (p. 221). Bridet, Kichenamourty and Marsh also comment the concept “fiction and facts” in order to avoid oversimplifications. However, Kichenamourty finds the postscript “incontestable” (indisputable) because it includes many details that permits the reader to estimate the difference between fiction and historical facts.<sup>62</sup> Marsh demonstrates how the novel is riddled with inaccuracies and omissions.<sup>63</sup> Weber focuses on omissions. When Morel tells Gourdieu that the French govern in complete understanding with the Indian population and that the workers in Pondichéry have no need for trade unions, important facts are omitted. A number of strikes occurred in Pondichéry during the 1930s. In July 1936, workers in Pondichéry were on strike to achieve the same wages and rights to organize trade unions as the workers in France. French police shot and killed twelve of the strikers (p.243). The killings were reported to Paris. Kichenamourty refers to the police violence and killings as the “Jallianwallabagh pondichérien”, a comparison with Amritsar in 1919. Kichenamourty makes a statement when he refers to the narrative and writes: “After this, nobody could say as did Morel that the pondichérien proletariat was neither badly treated nor manhandled.”<sup>64</sup>

“The threat of communism or anarchy” is addressed, the “Farrère-Delamare message” of *Désordres à Pondichéry*. Weber refers to the narrative and the report written to Paris by the character La Verdière, a French official. LaVerdiere reports that Gandhi-likes operate in Pondichéry and belong to the anti-colonial communist movement subsidized by Moscow spreading in French India. The character’s text expresses the French right wing conservative opinion equalizing anti-colonial freedom movements with communism, characteristic in the 1930s. Weber finds the text in concordance with Farrère’s preface, furthermore with Farrère’s bitter patriotism in *L’Inde perdue*: “on retrouve, dans *Désordres à Pondichéry*, l’expression du même patriotisme, amer et lucide” [...one recognizes, in *Désordres à Pondichéry*, the expression for the same patriotism, bitter and clear] (p. 246).

Weber concludes that “*Désordres à Pondichéry* belongs to the anti-communist colonial novels of the time, and adds that for Georges Delamare this meant an immense threat to all European colonies (p. 234). Marsh comments on the significance of how Delamare selects the

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<sup>62</sup> Kichenamourty, p. 252.

<sup>63</sup> Marsh, p. 62.

<sup>64</sup> Kichenamourty, p. 252.

‘facts’ and how colonialism and communism could be conceptualized in popular fiction of the time.<sup>65</sup>

*Désordres à Pondichéry* was popular, just as Farrère hoped in his preface. There were eight reprints in 1938. The novel was published at a time when the interest for the colonies peaked. A special committee to promote the colonies was created by the government. The colonial propaganda was successful. “Nombreux sont, à l’époque où Delamare écrit, les Français hostiles ‘à l’abandon de n’importe quelle partie de notre domain colonial’”, Weber quotes *Le Temps* the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1938 [Many French are, at the time Délamare writes, hostile to the abandon of any, regardless which, of our colonial domain overseas] (p. 247).

Weber’s closes with remarks referring to what is definitely omitted in *Disordres à Pondichéry*: the nazism in Germany, the fascism in Italy, the total “disorder” and threats spreading darkness over Europe. To read *Desordres à Pondichéry*, with Weber, is to get a French history lesson on the small *comptoir* Pondichéry, liberated without bloodshed and today an independent territory in India.

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<sup>65</sup> Marsh, p. 84-87.

## CONCLUSION

Georges Delamare's novel fitted well into the French pro-colonial discourse of its time. When rediscovered by the historian Jacques Weber in the 1980s, it was characterized as a "colonial" novel, its message in concordance with Farrère's preface, something that other scholars have agreed with. Would a paratextual analysis of the 1997 KailasH edition of *Désordres à Pondichéry* provide the same result?

Farrère's original preface is characterized by a stern message to the readers to consider the history and current situation of Pondichéry, enclosed by the British, neglected by the metropolis, and with threats of Communism or anarchy. There is an ambiguity toward Delamare's text. Farrère does not approve of the ending. The narrative begins in concordance with the side text: a nostalgic picture of Pondichéry, a history lesson, a "seascape" with armed "yellows and blacks", and restriction due to the enclosure of the British. In the narrative, French officials and members of the old French families are concerned about Communism and anarchy, in convergence with the preface. However, divergence occurs when no severe threats of "Communism or anarchy" are "mise en scène" in the city. Most parts of the lively narrative are more of an entertaining script, *la ville blanche* and *la ville noire*, both without famine, protest or disorder. The "colonial novel" gains a touch of orientalism with the Krishna-story and the very young *bayadères* available for money. This "literary pedophilia" may spice up the text, but escapes the frame of the narrative provided by the preface. The ending sees order and harmony in Pondichéry. Thus, the combination of outcome and narrated style diverges the text from the message in the preface. The narrative in the light of the preface is rather out of concordance with Weber's opinion – and that of his colleagues, except for Kichenamourty – that the narrative completely includes the message in the preface. The context of the time for publication and the intention of the authors, Farrère and Delamare, provides another perspective.

Weber's posthumous postscript provides facts on the interrelated history of colony and metropolis, framing the narrative by the use of an historical background. Weber walks the reader through the text and explores the conceptualization of French colonial ideology in the narrative. Weber adds facts to the book, as well as focus on factual omissions. Pondichéry had experienced disorder since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mission of the Communist agent in the narrative is to initiate a labour union among the factory workers, and eventually a strike. However, the workers at the many factories had been on strike several times during the 1930s. In July 1936, 12 strikers were shot to death by the French police in Pondichéry. The incident

was reported to Paris, information most likely available to Delamare himself. The shooting of the strikers is referred to as the “Jallianwallabagh pondichérien” by Kichenamourty, referring to the Amritsar massacre in 1919, when pilgrims had gathered at a place called Jallianwalla Bagh and were fired upon by troops of the Indian British Army.

“Communism or anarchy”, with Moscow behind all anti-colonial liberation movements, belongs within the discourse of the original preface and the narrative. A tendentious assertion, but Weber comments that Claude Farrère and George Delamare experienced Communism as a terrible risk that threatened all European colonies. The book belongs to the series of anti-communist colonial novels important for their time.

Delamare’s “conceptualization of Pondichéry under threat from a sinister international force of Communism” could easily be transferred to any other part of “la plus grande France” according to Weber. Marsh agrees, Pondichéry is a chosen symbol of the overall empire. Ravi narrows the perspective down: Pondichéry remains a powerful French signifier of *L’Inde perdue*, “lost India”. One may wonder if the omission of the French police killings of strikers – the “Jallianwallabagh pondichérien” – is a signifier of the pro-colonial novel *Désordres à Pondichéry*, written in France, for a French audience.

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